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Mr C Brown
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Brown

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and pupils, during my visit on 16 November 2011 to look at work in geography.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff and pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; and observation of three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is good.

- Attainment over the last three years has fluctuated but is improving over time. During the visit, all pupils were working at the age-related national expectations with a significant number exceeding this. This was especially the case in Key Stage 2.
- Current Year 5 pupils have a good grasp of a range of map skills and understanding of maps at different scales. They demonstrated good recall of the study of a foreign locality including the specific location, human processes and the impact of these on people's lives.
- In Year 2, pupils are able to ask simple geographical questions and are beginning to understand processes such as those related to farming. They are able to draw land-use maps with conventions such as a key, compass rose and title, and can use two figure coordinates accurately.

- Pupils make good progress. This was evident in all lessons observed. For example, in Year 3, through the use of interactive computer programmes, pupils were able to give well-founded reasons for their choice of settlement location in a range of imaginary scenarios and then apply this to real places in England. Equally, in Year 1, pupils developed the use of directional language and understanding of a plan when following a route around the school.
- Pupils' behaviour in lessons is good. They are enthusiastic and work well together in pairs and small groups, cooperating effectively.

Quality of teaching in geography

The quality of teaching in geography is good.

- Teachers plan lessons in detail with clear learning intentions that are shared with the pupils.
- Lessons have a clear structure with a good balance of whole-class teaching, pair or group work, and individual tasks. The transition between each is effective and well managed.
- Class activities are tailored well to meet individual pupils' needs through different tasks, resources or support from staff. This ensures appropriate challenge and a good pace to learning.
- Although most teachers are not geography specialists they demonstrate good subject knowledge and apply this confidently in their teaching.
- A broad range of learning activities is used including the use of the school grounds and information and communication technology. Older pupils respond well to the opportunity to work independently.
- Teachers assess pupils' understanding in lessons well. Good use is made of targeted questioning and thinking time if pupils do not immediately respond. The assessment of prior knowledge is also a good feature and used well to plan the next steps in learning.
- A useful assessment document supports teachers when making judgements of the level at which each pupil is working. However, no examples of pupils' work are available to illustrate what is required at each level.
- Although teachers mark pupils' work regularly and provide useful comments, the overall information about how well an individual pupil is progressing in a unit of work is not shared with them.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is good.

- The curriculum is broad and balanced and includes the study of a range of places, physical and human processes, skills and higher-level concepts.

- The progress pupils are expected to make in aspects of geography, map and fieldwork skills is carefully planned across all years and is shared with staff.
- Detailed planning is in place for geography-specific units of work and opportunities for geographical experiences are identified in non-subject units, especially the use of mapwork. A few of the units of work include content that is dated.
- Pupils have good opportunities to undertake fieldwork in most years, including good use of the local environment as well as visits to places further afield.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is good.

- The subject coordinator is well informed and an enthusiastic advocate of geography across the school. Having worked in both key stages, the coordinator has a good understanding of the expectations required.
- The coordinator has ensured that the international dimension and sustainability are key aspects of the provision.
- Over the last few years, the coordinator has worked effectively to ensure that geography is integral to the school's curriculum and that all the supporting documentation is in place and updated as required.
- The quality of geography is reviewed annually and self-evaluation is accurate. Well-structured, manageable action plans result from this. These focus appropriately on reviewing provision but do not link this explicitly to the impact this has on raising standards.
- Monitoring of teachers' planning and pupils' work is regular with discussions held to ascertain pupils' views of geography. First-hand observation of geography teaching is less well developed.
- There are good displays of pupils' work in geography around the school.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- converting the current National Curriculum assessment document for teachers into guidance that can be understood by pupils so that they are aware of the progress they are making in each unit of work
- developing a portfolio of pupils' work to illustrate the different National Curriculum levels so that staff fully understand the requirements of the higher levels in each key stage
- reviewing the content of certain curriculum units and introducing more up-to-date materials.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop geography in the school.

As explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Paul Dowgill
Additional Inspector